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**NEWS RELEASE**  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Indiana State Department of Agriculture fills key positions**

**INDIANAPOLIS (March 6, 2017)** — The [Indiana State Department of Agriculture](#) (ISDA) announced today the hiring of three new employees to fill key positions, including a Hoosier Homestead Award Program Manager, Deputy Communications Director and Field Auditor.

"Above all, our mission is to grow Indiana agriculture and serve as a resource for the industry," said Ted McKinney, ISDA Director. "By filling these positions, we will be able to carry out our mission more effectively and continue to move agriculture forward in Indiana."

### ***Linda Forler, Hoosier Homestead Award Program Manager***

As the Hoosier Homestead Award Program Manager, Forler will oversee all portions of the program, which was created to honor Indiana's longstanding farming families. She will be responsible for processing the applications, communicating with applicants and planning award ceremonies twice a year, among other duties.

Forler joins ISDA with 20 years of corporate and non-profit communications, marketing and planning experience. She began her career in corporate communication with OneAmerica and later moved into sales at National Insurance Services. Forler currently works in various leadership roles with several non-profit organizations, including the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and the Zionsville Presbyterian Church. She graduated from Purdue University with a bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations and lives in Zionsville, Ind.

### ***Ian Connor, Deputy Communications Director***

As Deputy Communications Director, Connor will assist the Communications Director with promoting the agency's mission (to support growth in Indiana agriculture) through various communications channels, such as news releases, social media and the website, to name a few.

Connor began his career in public relations working as a public information officer for the Indiana Department of Homeland Security. In that role, he served as a media liaison and multimedia specialist, coordinating social media messages and managing the agency's website. In addition to working for the state, Connor worked in public relations for Harrison College and in the television industry with WEHT in Evansville. He graduated from the University of Southern Indiana with a bachelor's degree in Radio/Television and lives in Indianapolis, Ind.

### ***Dakota Shepard, Field Auditor***

As a Field Auditor for the Indiana Grain Buyers and Warehouse Licensing Agency, Shepard will perform discovery audits of agricultural businesses with the primary goal being to ensure compliance with state regulations pertaining to the marketing and storage of producer grain.

Prior to joining ISDA, Shepard worked with the USDA's Farm Service Agency as a program technician, assisting producers with farm programs and records management. She graduated from The Ohio State University with an associate's degree in Agricultural Business and lives in Eaton, Ohio.

#### **ABOUT ISDA**

*The [Indiana State Department of Agriculture](#) (ISDA) was established as a separate state agency by the Legislature in 2005. The Director is appointed by the Governor and is a member of the Governor's Cabinet. Administratively, ISDA reports to [Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch](#), who also serves as Indiana's Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. Major responsibilities include advocacy for Indiana agriculture at the local, state and federal level, managing soil conservation programs, promoting economic development and agricultural innovation, serving as a regulatory ombudsman for agricultural businesses, and licensing grain firms throughout the state.*

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*Note to the press: The photos below are the official headshots of Linda Forler, Ian Connor and Dakota Shepard.*



*Linda Forler, Hoosier Homestead Award Program Manager*



Ian Connor, Deputy Communications Director



*Dakota Shepard, Field Auditor*

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